

SATURDAY, JULY 10, 1909.

meanest man in the mountains to his enemies and the whitest to his friends—eh, Harvey?

Harvey seemed uncommunicative. Studying his hand, he asked in a sour way whether it was a jackpot, and upon being told that it was not, pushed forward some chips and looked stupidly up—though Harvey was by no means stupid. "Proud to know you, sir," said Bill, bending frankly as he put out his hand. "Proud to know any friend of Murray Sinclair's. What might be your business?"

Again Du Sang appeared abstracted. He looked up at the giant line man, who, in spite of his own size and strength, could have crushed him between his fingers, and hitched his chair a little, but got no further toward an answer and paid no attention whatever to Bill's extended hand.

"Cow business, Bill," interposed Sinclair. "Where? Why, up near the park, Bill, up near the park. Bill is an old friend of mine, Harvey. Shake hands with George Seagrave, Bill, and you know Henry Karg—and old Stormy Gorman—well, I guess you know him, too," exclaimed Sinclair, introducing the other players. "Look here a minute, Harvey."

Harvey, much against his inclination, was drawn from the table and retired with Sinclair and Dunning to an empty corner, where Dunning told his story again. At the conclusion of it Harvey rather snorted. Sinclair asked questions. "Was anybody else there when you saw McCloud, Bill?"

"One man," answered Bill, impressively. "Who?"

"A stranger to me."

"A stranger? What did he look like?"

"Slender man and kind of odd talking, with a sandy mustache."

"Hear his name?"

"He told me his name, but it's skipped me, I declare. He's kind of dark-complected like."

"Stranger, eh?" mused Du Sang; his eyes were wandering over the room.

"Slender man," repeated Bill, "but I didn't take much notice of him. Said he was in the real estate business."

"In the real estate business? And did he sit there while you talked this over with the college guy?" muttered Du Sang.

"He is all right, boys, and he said you'd know his name if I could speak it," declared Bill.

"Look anything like that man standing with his hands in his pockets over there by the wheel?" asked Du Sang, turning his back carefully on a newcomer as he made the suggestion.

"Where—there? No! Yes, hold on, that's the man there now! Hold on, now!" urged Bill, struggling with the excitement of ten hours and ten dollars in one day. "His name sounded like Fogarty."

As Dunning spoke, Sinclair's eyes riveted on the new face at the other

side of the gambling room. "Fogarty, hell!" he exclaimed, starting. "Stand right still, Du Sang; don't look around. That man is Whispering Smith."

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stant superintendent, Farrell Kennedy, chief of the special service, and his right-hand man, Bob Scott. In special Sinclair's presence at the bar, the cue was recalled. He had some cronies with him from among his up-country following, and was introducing his new bridge foreman, Karg, afterward known as Flat Nose, and George Seagrave, the Montana cowboy. Sinclair fraternized that day with the Williams Cache men, and it was remarked even then that though a railroad man he appeared somewhat outside the railroad circle. When the shooting matches were announced a brown-eyed railroad man was asked to enter. He had been out of the mountains for some time and was a comparative stranger in the gathering, but the Williams Cache men had not forgotten him; Rebstock, especially, wanted to see him shoot. While much of the time out of the mountains on railroad business, he was known to be closely in Bucks' counsels, and as to the mountains themselves, he was reputed to know them better than Bucks or Glover himself knew them. This was Whispering Smith; but, beyond a low-voiced greeting or an expression of surprise at meeting an old acquaintance, he avoided talk. When urged to shoot he resisted all persuasion and backed up his refusal by showing a bruise on his trigger finger. He declined even to act as judge in the contest, suggesting the sheriff, Ed Banks, for that office.

McCloud did not meet the host, Lance Dunning, that day nor since the day of the barbecue had Du Sang or Sinclair seen Whispering Smith until the night Du Sang spotted him near the wheel in the Three Horses. Du Sang at once drew out of his game and left the room. Sinclair in the meantime had undertaken a quarrelsome interview with Whispering Smith.

"I supposed you knew I was here," said Smith to him, amiably. "Of course I don't travel in a private car or carry a billboard on my back, but I haven't been hiding."

"The last time we talked," returned Sinclair, measuring words carefully, "you were going to stay out of the mountains."

"I should have been glad to, Murray. Affairs are in such shape on the division now that somebody had to come, so they sent for me."

The two men were sitting at a table. Whispering Smith was cutting and leisurely mixing a pack of cards.

"Well, so far as I'm concerned, I'm out of it," Sinclair went on after a pause, "but, however that may be, if you're back here looking for trouble there's no reason, I guess, why you can't find it."

"That's not it. I'm not here looking for trouble. I'm here to fix this thing up. What do you want?"

"Not a thing."

"I'm willing to do anything fair and right," declared Whispering Smith, raising his voice a little above the hum of the room.

"Fair and right is an old song." "And a good one to sing in this country just now. I'll do anything I can to adjust any grievance, Murray. What do you want?"

Sinclair for a moment was silent, and his answer made plain his unwillingness to speak at all. "There never would have been a grievance if I'd been treated like a white man." His eyes burned suddenly. "I've been treated like a dog."

"That is not it."

"That is it," declared Sinclair, savagely, "and they'll find it's it."

"Murray, I want to say only this—only this to make things clear. Bucks feels that he's been treated worse than a dog."

"Then let him put me back where I belong."

"It's a little late for that, Murray; a little late," said Smith, gently. "Shouldn't you rather take good money and get off the division? Mind you, I say good money, Murray—and peace."

Sinclair answered without the slightest hesitation. "Not while that man McCloud is here."

Whispering Smith smiled. "I've got no authority to kill McCloud."

"There are plenty of men in the mountains that don't need any."

"But let's start fair," urged Whispering Smith, softly. He leaned forward with one finger extended in confidence. "Don't let us have any misunderstanding on the start. Let McCloud alone. If he is killed—now I'm speaking fair and open and making no threats, but I know how it will come out—there will be nothing but killing here for six months. We will make just that memorandum on McCloud. Now about the main question. Every sensible man in the world wants something."

"I know men that have been going a long time without what they wanted."

Smith flushed and nodded. "You needn't have said that, but no matter. Every sensible man wants something, Murray. This is a big country. There's a World's Fair running somewhere all the time in it. Why not travel a little? What do you want?"

"I want my job, or I want a new superintendent here."

"Just exactly the two things, and, by heavens! the only two, I can't manage. Come once more and I'll meet you."

"No!" Sinclair rose to his feet. "No—damn your money! This is my home. The high country is my country. It's where my friends are."

That, filled with your friends; I know that. But don't put your trust in your friends. They will stay by you, I know; but once in a while while there will be a false friend, Murray, one that will sell you—remember that."

"I stay."

Whispering Smith looked up in admiration. "I know you're game. It isn't necessary for me to say that to you. But think of the fight you are going into against this company. You can worry them; you've done it. But a bronco might as well try to buck a locomotive as for one man or six or 600 to win out in the way you are playing."

"I will look out for my friends; others—" Sinclair hitched his belt and paused, but Whispering Smith, cutting and running the cards, gave no heed. His eyes were fixed on the green cloth under his fingers. "Others—" repeated

Sinclair.

"Others?" echoed Whispering Smith, good-naturedly.

"Of course, of course! Well, if this is the end of it, I'm sorry."

"You will be sorry if you mix in a quarrel that is none of yours."

"Why, Murray, I never had a quarrel with a man in my life."

"You are pretty smooth, but you can't drive me out of this country. I know how well you'd like to do it; and, take notice, there's one trail you can't cross even if you stay here. I suppose you understand that."

Smith felt his heart leap. He sat in his chair turning the pack slowly, but with only one hand now; the other hand was free. Sinclair eyed him sidewise. Smith moistened his lips and when he replied spoke slowly:

"There is no need of dragging any allusion to her into it. For that matter, I told Bucks he should have sent any man but me. If I'm in the way, Sinclair, if my presence here is all that stands in the way, I'll go back and stay back as before, and send any one else you like or Bucks likes. Are you willing to say that I stand in the way of a settlement?"

Sinclair sat down and put his hands on the table. "No; your matter and mine is another affair. All I want between you and me is fair and right."

Whispering Smith's eyes were on the cards. "You've always had it." "Then keep away from her."

"Don't tell me what to do."

"Then don't tell me."

"I'm not telling you. You will do as you please; so will I. I left here because Marion asked me to. I am here now because I have been sent here. It is in the course of my business. I have my living to earn and my friends to protect. Don't dictate to me, because it would be of no use."

"Well, you know now how to get into trouble."

"Every one knows that; few know how to keep out."

"You can't lay your finger on me at any turn of the road."

"Not if you behave yourself."

"And you can't bully me."

"Surely not. No hard feelings, Murray. I came for a friendly talk, and if it's all the same to you I'll watch this wheel awhile and then go over to the Wickup. I leave first—that's understood, I hope—and if your pink-eyed friend is waiting outside tell him there is nothing doing, will you, Murray? Who is the albino, by the way? You don't know him? I think I do. Fort City, if I remember. Well, good-night, Murray."

It was after 12 o'clock and the room had filled up. Roulette balls were dropping, and above the faro table the extra lights were on. The dealers, fresh from supper, were putting things in order for the long run.

At the Wickup Whispering Smith found McCloud in the office signing letters. "I can do nothing with him," said Smith, drawing down a window shade before he seated himself to detail his talk with Sinclair. "He wants a fight."

McCloud put down his pen. "If I am the disturber it would be better for me to get out."

"That would be hauling down the flag across the whole division. It is too late for that. If he didn't center the light on you he would center it somewhere else. The whole question is, who is going to run this division, Sinclair and his gang or the company? and it is as easy to meet them on one point as another. I know of no way of making this kind of an affair pleasant. I am going to do some

riding, as I told you. Kennedy is working up through the Deep Creek country, and has three men with him. I shall ride toward the Cache and meet him somewhere near South Mission pass."

"Gordon, would it do you good to ask a few questions?"

"Ask as many as you like, my dear boy, but don't be disappointed if I can't answer them. I can look wise, but I don't know anything. You know what we are up against. This fellow has grown a tiger among the wolves, and has turned the pack loose on us. One thing I ask you to do. Don't expose yourself at night. Your life isn't worth a coupling-pin if you do."

McCloud raised his hand. "Take care of yourself! If you are murdered in this fight I shall know I got you in and that I am to blame."

"And suppose you were?" Smith had risen from his chair. He had few mannerisms, and recalling the man the few times I have seen him, the only impression he has left on me is that of quiet and gentleness. "Suppose you were?" He was resting one arm on top of McCloud's desk. "What of it? You have done for me up here what I couldn't do. George, you have been kind to Marion when she hadn't a friend near. You when I didn't want me to—helped her when I hadn't the privilege of doing it." McCloud put up his hand in protest, but it was unheeded. "How many times it has been in my heart to tell that man she knows it; she prays it may never happen. That is why she stays here and

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"It is all right for me to pay it, but I don't want you to pay it. Will you have a care for yourself, Gordon?"

"Will you?"

"You need never ask me to be careful," Smith went on. "That is my business. I asked you to watch your window shades at night, and when I came in just now I found one up. It is you who are likely to forget, and in this kind of a game a man never forgets but once. I'll lie down on the Lincoln lounge, George."

"Get into the bed."

"No; I like the lounge, and I'm off early."

In the private room of the superintendent, provided as a sleeping apartment in the old headquarters building many years before hotel facilities reached Medicine Bend, stood the only curio the Wickup possessed—the Lincoln lounge. When the car that carried the remains of Abraham Lincoln from Washington to Springfield was dismantled, the Wickup felt heir to one piece of its elaborate furnishings, the lounge, and the lounge still remains as an early-day relic. Whispering Smith walked into the bedroom and disposed himself in an incredibly short time. "I've borrowed one of your pillows, George," he called out, presently.

"Take both."

"One's enough. I hope," he went on, rolling himself like a hen into the double blanket, "the horse Kennedy has left me will be all right; he got three from Bill Dunning. Bill Dunning, he snorted, driving his nose into the pillow as if in final memorandum for the night, "he will get himself killed if he fools around Sinclair too much now."

McCloud, under a light shade above his desk, opened a roll of blue-prints. He was going to follow a construction gang up the Crawling Stone in the morning and wanted to look over the surveys. Whispering Smith, breathing regularly, lay not far away. It was late when McCloud put away his maps, entered the inner room and looked at his friend.

He lay like a boy asleep. On the chair beside his head he had placed his old-fashioned hunting-case watch, as big as an alarm clock, the kind a railroad man would wind up with a spike-maul. Beside the watch he had laid his huge revolver in its worn leather scabbard. Breathing peacefully, he lay quite at his companion's mercy, and McCloud, looking down on this man who never made a mistake, never forgot a danger, and never took an unnecessary chance, thought of what between men confidence may sometimes mean. He sat a moment with folded arms on the side of his bed, studying the quiet face, defenseless in the slumber of fatigue. When he turned out the light and lay down, he wondered whether, somewhere in the valley of the great river to which he was to take his men in the morning, he should encounter the slight and reckless horseman who had blazed so in anger when he stood before her at Marion's. He had struggled against her charm too long. She had become, how or when he could not tell, not alone a pretty woman but a fascinating one—the creature of his constant thought. Already she meant more to him than all else in the world. He well knew that if called on to choose between Dickie and all else he could only choose her. But as he drew together the curtains of thought and sleep stole in upon him, he was resolved first to have Dickie; to have all else if he could, but, in any case, Dickie Dunning. When he awoke day was breaking in the mountains. The huge silver watch, the low-voiced man had the formidable six-shooter had disappeared. It was time to get up, and Marion Sinclair had promised an early breakfast.

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